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AMERICAN SPIES: Coming in from the cold

By Daniel Southerland

Staff correspondent of The Christian Science Monitor

Washington

"The Soviets," says the bespectacled round-faced man who looks more like a stockbroker than America's top spy, "got virtually a free ride on all of our research and development."

He's talking about secret agents — from the Soviet bloc. And, he says, they plundered America's technological secrets because our own spies weren't watching them.

The speaker is William C. Casey, the director of the Central Intelligence Agency and coordinator for all intelligence gathering for the United States. He indicates that things are likely to become much tougher for the Soviets in the world's intensifying spy wars if he has his way.

After years of controversy and cutback, America's spies are finally getting a break.

The Reagan administration is putting more money and manpower into the business of spying, and into countering Soviet bloc spies both at home and abroad.

Exact figures on recruiting for the spy trade and on the money spent on the intelligence agencies are kept secret. But it is clear that after years of decline, spying is now a "growth industry." One of the few government institutions which is hiring new employees in this time of recession is the US Central Intelligence Agency.

In the view of some experts, the effort comes none too soon.

"We've got to strengthen HUMINT," says one of the experts who has access to sensitive intelligence reports, speaking in the peculiar argot of professional spies. He means "human intelligence gathering".

"Our SIGINT (signal intelligence) and photo intelligence are among the best, but in HUMINT . . . we're lucky if we're among the top 10."

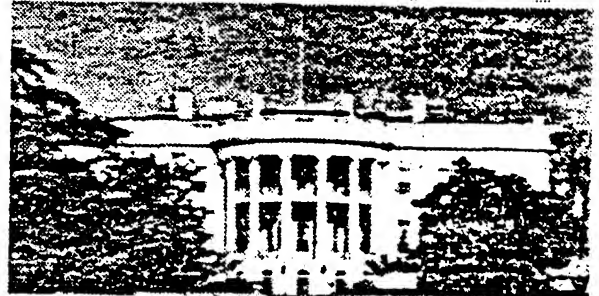
The Reagan administration took power some 21 months ago determined to strengthen intelligence collection, analysis, and operations, and the dozen agencies that make up what is known in the trade as the "intelligence community" are benefiting.

Take the Federal Bureau of Investigation, for example. According to one high-ranking intelligence officer, FBI money and manpower was once stretched to the point where the bureau had to stop surveillance of certain known Soviet spies, who, together with European surrogate spies, were operating in an increasingly sophisticated and aggressive manner in this country.

The FBI has become increasingly concerned over the loss to Soviet spies of American high technology information. Although precise figures are closely guarded, it is now clear that the FBI is getting more in way of resources to conduct a more aggressive counterespionage program.

Mr. Casey argues, however, that the intelligence agencies are not so much increasing their budgets as they are building back to where they were before they got cut during the 1970s.

In a more than hour-long interview with the Monitor, Casey said that because of these cuts in money and manpower, intelligence reporting on an increasingly turbulent third world and on a variety of other problems had been drastically reduced. According to Casey, major intelligence analyses, known as "national estimates" often failed to cover third world developments.



US intelligence: focus on the Kremlin, third world countries

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